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BG

SUBJECT: HOME ADVISER DISCUSSES RAB ENGAGEMENT,
ANTI-CORRUPTION DRIVE AND BORDER SECURITY WITH AMBASSADOR

REF: A. STATE 101210

[1](#)B. PDAS CAMP/EMBASSY DHAKA EMAIL OF 9/22

Classified By: Ambassador James Moriarty, 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Home Affairs Adviser M.A. Matin welcomed prospects for engagement between the USG and the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) in a September 23 meeting with the Ambassador. He also welcomed a USG inter-agency assessment of Bangladesh's border controls. Matin was pre-occupied, however, with the apparent failure of the Caretaker Government's anti-corruption campaign, saying he was "frustrated" and "counting the days" to the handover of power to an elected government. Matin's top priority for his remaining three months in office is maintaining law and order and preventing the resurgence of terrorist groups like HUJI-B.

RAB ENGAGEMENT

[1](#)2. (C) On September 23, the Ambassador presented Ref A points on the parameters of USG engagement with Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) to Home Affairs Adviser Maj. Gen. (ret'd) M.A. Matin and Home Secretary Abdul Karim. Matin welcomed the news, noting effective law and order was his top priority. In reference to our requirement for information regarding incidents of custodial death at the sub-unit level, Matin assured the Ambassador that the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) investigated all cases at the magistrate level and noted the GOB had provided documentation on these matters to the USG in the past. (NOTE: EmbOffs are following up at the working level with RAB and other GOB offices to present Ref A points and elicit the required list of incidents. END NOTE.)

USG ASSESSMENT OF BANGLADESH BORDERS

[1](#)3. (C) Matin also welcomed the results of a border assessment conducted in June by a USG inter-agency team. The Ambassador highlighted the team's main finding: Bangladesh border authorities focus on revenue collection to the detriment of efforts to detect suspicious persons or cargo. The assessment team identified many easy steps to tighten Bangladesh's borders, particularly the flow of passengers and cargo. The Ambassador told Matin he looked forward to continued interaction between the USG and GOB on ways to secure Bangladesh's borders.

FAILED ANTI-CORRUPTION DRIVE

14. (C) Matin did not comment extensively on the issues of RAB engagement and the border assessment; he was clearly pre-occupied with the apparent failure of the Caretaker Government's (CTG'S) anti-corruption campaign. He blasted Bangladesh's courts and the recent flood of corruption suspects being released on bail. He said most of Bangladesh's judges were "third-rate lawyers" elevated to the bench only because of their political ties; he faulted the Caretaker Government for not tackling the courts and judges as part of the CTG's anti-corruption drive. According to Matin, jailed suspects in the corruption drive can arrange to be released on bail by paying 2.5 million taka (about USD 37,000) in "fees." Matin contrasted this with the 300,000 taka (about USD 4,400) monthly salary the GOB offered top lawyers to pursue corruption cases. Matin pointed to the release on bail of politicians from both of the main parties -- including Sheikh Selim, cousin of Awami League leader and former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and Salauddin Quader Chowdhury of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP); there was proof these figures were corrupt and yet they were being released on bail and feted by supporters. Matin confided his frustration with politicians and with being Bangladeshi.

COUNTER-TERRORISM EFFORTS

15. (C) During his last few months in office, Matin said his sole focus would be maintaining law and order in the run-up

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to December elections. His focus on law and order included continued efforts to counter terrorism. He pointed to the recent arrests of eight individuals in the Northwestern city of Rajshahi, for passing out leaflets advocating the overthrow of the government in the name of Islam. Matin claimed he had received threats in the wake of the arrests but was unfazed. "Let them blow me up," he said. Matin also told the Ambassador he was following closely the efforts of Harkat ul Jihad Al Islami - Bangladesh (HUJI-B) to establish a political party, the Islamic Democratic Party (IDP). Home Secretary Karim said the GOB would not allow HUJI-B to re-organize and gain strength. Matin agreed, warning, "We will crush them."

ADVISER MATIN'S FUTURE PLANS

16. (C) Given his frustration with the anti-corruption drive, his stated desire to leave office was not a surprise. He said he was "counting the days" to hand over the Home Ministry to his successor, though he was pessimistic about the prospects for his being replaced by an honest official. Matin, who distinguished himself as a young captain in Bangladesh's 1971 war for independence, said he was looking forward to retiring to his home in Chittagong, where he ran a private English-medium elementary school.

COMMENT

17. Matin's comments about the anti-corruption drive echo those of many in the Caretaker Government, business and civil society. A strong supporter of USG law enforcement and counterterrorism programs, he played an important role in the Caretaker Government's immediate response to Cyclone Sidr and facilitated USG cyclone assistance. Matin urged the Ambassador and Embassy to continue coordination with the Home Ministry, noting that Home Secretary Karim would remain in place during the transition period of the new government and serve as the institutional memory.

Moriarty